

Alexa B.

The Poison Age was upon us. We had brought it upon us, by seasoning our streets, yards and parks with trash. Filling the Earth's air with smoke from factories we built. The air was a cloudy haze making it seem as though you were always dreaming, the ground a murky mud and slop. All greenery had fled, retreating from Earth, leaving dead lands in its wake.

The Landfills. Home of the Scavengers- the poor, but united people, who wore gas masks and old clothing. They were the only people left on Earth. Other people, they had fled to the Space Station, leaving their mess of a planet left behind, and leaving a station full of food for the Scavengers.

I would never leave. I was a Scavenger, but I had always known that I was different. Special. Plants were gone, but I had always wanted to bring them back. So I stayed.

My best friend, and fellow Scavenger, Neci wanted to leave. Join the little family he had left, in space. But he stayed, waiting for me to choose to come with him.

I think he knew I never would, but that didn't stop him from trying to persuade me. Stay, he would tell me. When I said no, I caught his emerald eyes darkening. He told me with a bitter gaze, that the people in the Space Station, were cutting off our food supply, pushing the Scavengers to flee Earth.

So I made a promise. A vow.

I would grow our food, how I had no clue.

But I would.

I walked over to Cosette's house. She was an elderly woman, living out the remainder of her days on Earth.

When I entered her aged house, I immediately saw her, sitting on a frayed yellow couch. She had ink, dancing around on her pale, wrinkled skin, contrasting with her foggy blue eyes, and making her black, greying hair more striking. I grinned at Cosette and my heart leapt in joy as she smiled back. My heart stopped and started again, reluctantly in acceptance, as Cosette spat out a dry cough, and did her best to regain composure.

I handed her half my bread Neci had gotten me from the station on Earth. She thanked me, and I brushed it off. It was the right thing to do, that is why I did it everyday.

But Cosette reached out and put a shaky hand on my arm, the coldness of her touch turning my sweat icy. She told me that the bond I felt with the Earth, not wanting to leave it, but wanting to help it- she felt it to.

The world paused, and I gratefully took the time to absorb what she said. I wasn't the only one.

But I always knew that Cosette cared for the Earth, so I was hardly in awe as she handed me something.

An apple.

We hadn't seen fruit in the Landfills for years. I took it, and Cosette told me with a grin to keep it. Get the seeds and grow food, if the air would allow it.

She knew. Knew that Neci and I would be forced to leave when the food ran short.

I thanked her and sprinted out the door.

I tried to grow the tree, I really did.

But the air was no condition for greenery. My days spent kneeling in the dirt with a watering can were wasted. The plant was dying, the poison in the air killing it.

I thought I was important, gone looking for ways to do something worthwhile, and upon finding one, it turned out to be useless. And it stung. Stung that Neci, my best friend would leave. It stung even

more that one day, I would be forced to g with him, see his face. Tell him I failed. Tell Cosette that I was leaving her, a failure. If I believed in myself, I would be lying to myself. I was worthless pretending to be worthy, and that made me a fool.

I threw the scrappy watering can on the ground and listened to the satisfying squeal it made against the mud and slop.

And with a breath through my gas mask, I spun on my heel and went inside.

I tossed and turned in my bed for hours, then gave up sleeping and laid still. Then a raindrop fell from a hole in the roof, landing between my eyes. I spat a curse and bolted up, barking as my knee made painful contact with a wall.

I looked through a hole in my door, past the fuzzy, lighthearted downpour, and saw green.

The tree, growing. My heart raced faster than me, as I burst out the door, falling to my knees in the mud around the plant.

I had done it, so I named the plant Hope.

And once I heard footsteps approaching, my head whipped up. I saw Neci smiling at me, and through my tears, I smiled back.